DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 367 207 HE 027 155

AUTHOR Pacey, Lucille
TITLE Strategic Planning and Open Learning: Turkey Tails and Frogs.
INSTITUTION Open Learning Agency, Burnaby (British Columbia).
PUB DATE Nov 92
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Meeting of the International Council in Distance Education (Bangkok, Thailand, November 1992).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Change Agents; Change Strategies; *Distance Education; Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Futures (of Society); Higher Education; Long Range Planning; Open Universities; *Strategic Planning; Technological Advancement

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the principles of strategic planning and how they can be applied in open and distance learning for greater student success. The model selected for discussion is the Applied Strategic Planning Model which proposes nine important steps for strategic planning: planning to plan, values audit, mission formulation, strategic business modeling, performance audit, contingency planning, gap analysis, integrated functional plans, and implementation. The paper argues that the rate and depth of change in the world demands strategic planning for effective, holistic response to complex situations. A further section elaborates on the profound global and educational changes now taking place, changes that are bringing education to the threshold of a different reality. Effective response demands that planners completely rethink their approach to planning and particularly that they abandon linear planning and be open to challenging all assumptions about change. A discussion of technology's impact suggests that traditional institutions may advance beyond distance education in taking advantage of technological improvements. In planning, the factory model where the learner is product will not work. Planning must enable learners and learning. A conclusion urges distance educators and institutions to be awake and responsive to these changes. (Contains 23 references.) (JB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 367 207

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND OPEN LEARNING: TURKEY TAILS AND FROGS

Prepared by:

LUCILLE PACEY

VICE-PRESIDENT, TECHNOLOGY AND EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION

OPEN LEARNING AGENCY
BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA

For:

THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

BANGKOK, THAILAND
NOVEMBER, 1992

HE 027 155

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Lucille Pacey

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ABSTRACT

> The organization that is intent on shaping strategic success will not only learn to reach to the demands of the marketplace, but will actively aspire to base its shape on the needs of its customers . . . This shift toward attending to the customer's wants can dramatically change the way in which business is done . . . and ultimately the way an organization succeeds. (Pfeiffer, Goodstein and Nolan, 1989, p. 52)

Strategic planning is the important process of giving life to our organizational purposes and visions. Whereas distance education was introduced in developed countries as an adjunct to conventional delivery methods, open learning promised more in terms of removing barriers of access and providing more flexibility in an environment of lifelong learning. Within our community of open learning we continue to demonstrate the successes that accompany this mind set and yet we continue to measure ourselves against the standards established by conventional systems.

Given the changes occurring in the global economy, the restructuring of governments, states and countries and the recognition that our human resources are key to survival and success, it is time to review our contributions.

Does our planning reflect this new reality? Are we flexible enough to demonstrate that we play an important and critical role in serving learners' needs and can alter our courses of action as the learners' needs change? Are we encouraging industry to provide us with the tools to do the job or are we content to follow? Are we establishing measures of success that are meaningful to the new reality of blurred distinctions of how and where people learn, or will we continue to follow the lead of conventional wisdom and cut off turkey tails because that's the way it's always been done, or will we sit placidly in tepid water, unaware that the temperature is rising?

Ursula Franklin suggests that for every planner there is a plannee -- "those who have to conform to what has been arranged beforehand."

As the voices of the plannees get louder and their needs are communicated more clearly, we are challenged to respond. Are we listening?

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of my paper is neither to discuss the definition of distance learning and open learning nor to address the functional elements that are represented in the work of open learning. Rather I want to devote the time I have to discuss the principles of strategic planning that come to us from a business environment and how they can be effectively applied in helping those in open learning succeed. Specifically, it addresses the planning process, factors of resistance to change, the impact of technology on society and the learner as client.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

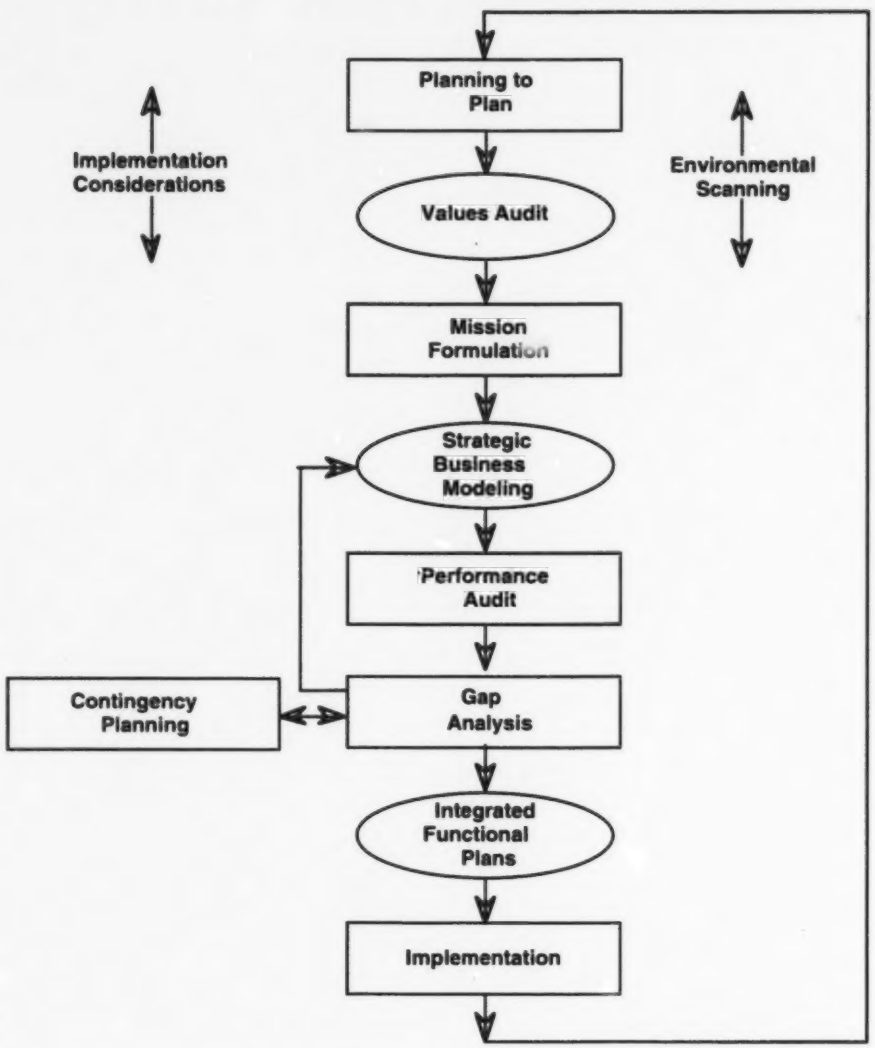
There are many models that are used and referred to as strategic planning, but it is fair to say that the component parts of the process, if not identical, are very similar in nature. "Strategic planning is the process by which the guiding members of an organization envision the organization's future and develop the necessary procedures and operations to achieve that future. The vision of the future provides both a direction and the energy to move in that direction . . . successful strategic planning is characterized by organizational self examination, confronting difficult choices, and setting priorities." (Pfeiffer, Goodstein and Nolan, 1989, p. 56)

Most organizations today are involved in some form of strategic planning. The model that they adopt is often the one that is most expedient to the nature of their organization, but there is a common understanding that the intent behind the process is to ensure that the organization can indeed envision its future, can influence the direction the future will take, and most important, if done properly, can create its future.

It has been natural for distance educators to accept the principles of strategic planning and even to embrace them in the context of the evolution of distance and open learning. In fact, just by virtue of the challenges that we have undertaken to break new ground in delivering education and improving access to learners, we have considered ourselves to be both politically and organizationally more progressive in our thinking, and the models of strategic planning have adapted reasonably and readily to our world. They are helpful in reducing complex issues into manageable component parts for analysis and resolution. Equally important, they can provide the framework for organizations to monitor their progress and to feed that information back into the process of envisioning a future. I think distance educators have been very good at picking up the model and struggling with its various component parts.

For the purposes of this paper I have selected a model (see The Applied Strategic Planning Model) put forward by Pfeiffer, Goodstein and Nolan, which proposes nine important steps for strategic planning, none of which will be new or surprising to you.

The Applied Strategic Planning Model



(Pfeiffer, Goodstein and Nolan, 1989, p. 6)

The first stage is metaplanning or planning to plan. It is incumbent upon the senior people within the organization to set the correct context for planning and to trigger the process. This is the stage where the commitment to planning is communicated to the organization and resources are identified to ensure a successful outcome.

The second stage is to ensure that there is commonalty in the values of the organization and a review of those values to ensure that they have not changed. This is the point where the organization looks inward, identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (the situational analysis). That information is often juxtaposed with an external environmental scan to ensure that the organization is aware of the factors that could have an impact on the eventual successful implementation of the strategic plan.

The mission is then articulated -- that wonderful clear statement that is understood by everyone within the organization and further, that can be used to explain the organization's work to others. Unfortunately, in distance education it is often difficult to find that one important phrase which describes the work succinctly and clearly. Not to be dissuaded the institutions do struggle through the process and eventually come forward with a mission statement which is promulgated throughout the organization. The mission statement is the anchor to the strategic plan and typically answers three primary questions:

- What does the organization do?
- Who does the organization serve?
- How does the organization carry out its task?

Pfeiffer's model then introduces the next logical stage in the process of strategic planning; this is to define the business objectives, including indicators of success and to describe the way the organization will look in the future. Typically, these descriptions span certain predetermined periods of time; for example, that could be one, two, or three years. At the same time that the organization is modeling itself, it will be using information that it has collected reflecting the recent performance of the organization using those key standards of measurement of success that it has agreed upon. This will ensure clarity and consistency of measurement and provide the opportunity to project past trends into the future.

This is an important stage of the strategic cycle in that it will allow the organization to ensure that it is following a trend line that is consistent and building on its strengths. It is natural to assume that the vision for the future and the evidence of where the organization is will not always be directly in synch. Therefore the next logical stage in strategic planning is to conduct a gap analysis. The gap analysis will identify whether or not there are differences between the vision and the current performance of the organization, but more importantly, it will force the planning team to prioritize and to identify creative ways to close the gap.

This becomes the core of the framework for the strategic direction of the organization; this information is shared throughout the organization and the process of developing functional or operational plans begins. These operational plans usually focus primarily on the "how", now that the "what" has been described and would include references to required resources and the redeployment of resources as appropriate. The most important phase is the implementation of the plan and testing that implementation against the success factors that had been articulated earlier.

It is a very neat, tidy model, promoting consultation and participation, building on past history and knowledge, and incorporating the necessary checks and balances key to

monitoring progress and allowing for timely adjustments. Theoretically, institutions involved in this or similar processes are able to ensure that they are at the leading edge of the development of open learning and are positioned properly to demonstrate the contribution they make to fostering access to learning, contributing to the love of learning and participating in that all-important economic agenda.

So you might ask why am I taking the time to review what seems to be an important process that most distance educators are committed to and practising? Over the last decade we have witnessed changes throughout the world that none of us anticipated or ever believed would occur. Few of these changes appeared to emerge in a carefully planned way, rather many of the changes appeared to counter a logical, rational process. As players in a changing world, do we know what forces are having an impact on our role? Can we afford the luxury of adhering to rational processes when everywhere we see explosions of radical economical, political and social changes? As leaders in education we cannot continue to tinker on the edges of what is a much bigger, more complex issue. Almost nothing in the real world is linear, yet we use linear models in everything we do. The work of the scientists in chaos theory illustrates so easily that reductionist thinking does not work when looking at complexity. We need to learn new skills that will help us address complex issues in a holistic fashion. Until we achieve this goal, we will never succeed in promoting the concept of lifelong learning in the world today.

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE

One does not have to go beyond the sound bytes of the newspapers, radio and television to conclude that massive changes and shifts are occurring worldwide. Economic reform is being reflected in approaches to trade barriers and moves towards country alliances forcing harmonization of policy, currency and standards.

Politically, governments are collapsing, others are being formed, and country alliances are bringing together unexpected "bedfellows." Countries that for years kept the rest of the world at bay are being opened; citizens now have a window on the world that can confuse, excite or instill any number of other emotions. People and cultures are demanding to be included; they have become impatient with governments and how governments have represented their needs and wants; racial discrimination is not invisible; and lack of access to the policy making process is being challenged.

Borders are being invaded; no longer can countries pretend that influences (good or bad) outside of their control will not have an impact on their people. The force of the media has opened up the world to the public in real, unedited time. This comes at a time when the threat of the 100 channel universe is voiced; where telecommunications can strip the competitive advantage of critical timing (or can enhance it); and when global environment issues move to the centre of the political, economic, and social debates.

Technological advances have been rapid, with the result that distributors of hardware and software are constantly introducing "new options" to organizations and individuals who are often prone to accept the technological advances as practice, thereby allowing technology to create practice. Globalization is underscored by new and different partnerships, quick access to information, changes in the ways information is used, technological advances and deployment, just to name a few.

Finally, there has been a definite linkage of education and training to the economic agenda of countries. This has always been assumed, but now it is being communicated by governments, businesses and unions. The challenge of building and maintaining a

standard of living where individuals have the opportunity to participate effectively has been tied to a well-trained knowledgeable population. People will need to know how to learn; indeed they will be forced to learn throughout their lives. Our political leaders have targeted education as the lifeline to economic prosperity, recognizing the need to emphasize training and education. They acknowledge the need for educational reform but continue to look back to the "old ways" to help them identify solutions.

Today, distance education and open learning are on the threshold of a different reality. The challenge facing us is how we communicate our roles and relationships in contributing to larger agendas, where education is seen as the anchor to a country's success and health. There is a sense of urgency to this challenge, for the social and economic changes will not wait for distance education.

So what is holding the distance learning institutions back?

- Is it the way institutions plan?
- Is it that institutions are just too comfortable in the industrialized production mode or that internal resistance to change is too strong?
- Is there a belief that the telecommunications and technology advances will only impact on the work of distance learning if it is allowed to do so?
- Will access be a strong enough factor to attract learners to take advantage of the services provided by distance and open learning institutions?

CREATING CHAOS: RETHINKING OUR APPROACH TO PLANNING

In his book, *Open Learning and Open Management*, Ross Paul describes a strategic planning exercise that was initiated in an orderly, participatory fashion, following the advice of experienced and well-written organizational strategists.

The process was not unlike the Pfeiffer model that I described earlier in this paper. Specifically, Paul writes, "My attempts to oversee a democratic process, seeking consensus as to . . . mission, mandate and planning almost met with disaster" (1990, p. 180). Paul goes on to describe the corrective action taken when the strategic planning process was "left in the lurch" and Paul on a "tightrope."

Interestingly enough, Paul's corrective actions, which included revisiting respective roles and "shifting the decision from what ought to be done to how it will be done" (1990, p. 180), resulted in a plan that was realistic and achievable. Ross did not argue in support of this change in process; rather he was illustrating the difficulties of using a rational, linear model for planning that does not provide for flexibility to accommodate change due to changing circumstances.

Planning is a dynamic process, requiring constant review, consultation and flexibility. Most contemporary planning models are reductionist in theory and practice. By breaking down the complex challenges (threats and opportunities) into ever smaller, containable and manageable envelopes we have allowed ourselves to lose sight of the whole. We can no longer see the forest for the trees. We are very good at data collection and analysis, review of trends and extrapolating those trends into the future in logical, linear ways.

"However, linear models are notoriously unreliable as predictors, which is their usual function" (Briggs and Peat, 1989, p. 175). One reason for this unreliability is tied to the

impossibility of reassembling the whole after the complex component parts have been analyzed in their separate units; the linear models cannot help us understand how the elements interact. Our organizations are not made up of separate, unrelated forces that can be managed piecemeal. Rather we have to work at breaking down this illusion and learning how to provide leadership in addressing the whole -- regardless of how complex this may be. Peter Senge argues that "we will have to move through the barriers that are keeping us from being truly vision-led and capable of learning" (Senge, 1990, p. 5). Scholars of organizational development are now beginning to refer to "nonlinear futures", or a "systems approach to reality" (Briggs and Peat, 1989, p. 174).

The systems approach is relatively young and still has to prove itself as a more effective way of examining organizational issues. It presupposes that we can learn to deal with complex organizational and management problems through nonlinear modeling. "The development of the systems model exemplifies the shift that the science of chaos and change is making from quantitative reductionism to a qualitative holistic appreciation of dynamics" (Briggs and Peat, 1989, pp. 175-176).

In the *Turbulent Mirror*, a book which discusses chaos theory and the science of wholeness, John Briggs and F. David Peat argue that nonlinear models are different from linear models in a number of ways.

The first is the move away from attempting to forecast the future on trends; rather the nonlinear or systems model seeks to identify the system's critical points and the barriers to change. Tied to this is an attempt to increase the intuition about how the system works, and to work in harmony with the system rather than against it. Cynics will and do challenge this approach, arguing that it is too "soft" and vague to be useful, and that you cannot model qualitative aspects of an organization because they are too subtle. Senge, however, has demonstrated in his work that it is possible to make the necessary shift and that those organizations which have participated in a systems approach have been able to identify and take into account the subtle dynamics that are so important.

The second difference is that in a nonlinear model the historical data that linear planners use to trace the ups and downs of trends to predict the future are left out. They are used to check the model rather than to create it.

The third difference relates to the notion of intuition itself. Linear and analytical models do not acknowledge or value intuition. Senge, on the other hand, argues that "learning to handle complexity means learning to live more intuitively, because intuition is the key to making significant changes in complex systems, helping them to evolve, and evolving with them" (Briggs and Peat, 1989, p. 179).

If we are to create a powerful vision for distance education and open learning in the future, we have to view the system as a subtle whole with dynamic and complex interrelationships. We can no longer assume that what we do in our institutions, states or countries will not have an impact upon the contiguous regions. As our organizations evolve we have to ensure that our connectedness to the whole is understood by the heads of state, political powers, as well as our respective colleagues and staff.

It is no longer good enough to use descriptors like single mode and dual mode institutions and to argue the merits and challenges faced by each. Instead, we need to understand our roles and relationships within systems of learning and education, our connectedness to economic development and wealth generation, as well as our influence on the learner and the culture of learning.

Rational, linear planning models are not helpful in understanding and dealing with this complexity. They tend to perpetuate the status quo or, at best, create expectations of constant linear growth which today are not proving to be very realistic or reliable. Senge puts forward the argument that in education the systems approach can move people away from the fix-it mode to a learning mode, making them much more effective intellectually.

CUTTING OFF TURKEY TAILS: THE NEED FOR CHANGE

"Distance teaching institutions based on the industrial model suffer from the disadvantage that their whole organization, and especially their management and decision-making process, is built around the requirements of the mass production of 'one way' teaching materials. Consequently, innovation is extremely difficult . . . " (Bates, 1990, p. 4). An interesting statement when one considers the principles of access, flexibility and learner centredness which are the cornerstones of open learning. In the struggle to promote distance education and open learning, institutions were forced to make choices, such as how to develop courses, how to deliver them, how to support the learner and how to demonstrate a quality product. These choices were backed up by procedures, staffing decisions, labour unions, and capitalization of such things as hardware, software, and printing presses. Gradually, these institutions which were founded on flexibility find themselves increasingly locked into rigid operational patterns that tend to lose sight of the learner.

It is reasonable to experience internal resistance to change because it is difficult for organizations to challenge the established practices that they have worked so hard to institute; so we learn from each other, we share our lessons, adapt or redefine them and transport them between different countries and contexts. In our quest for credibility and acceptability, we have devoted considerable effort to documenting and publishing the details of our practice, indeed, to adopting familiar traditional practices. Over time these conventional practices have become norms defining our institutional cultures, and it should not surprise us that we are faced with internal resistance to change similar to that experienced by conventional institutions.

An excellent example of being locked into conventional thinking is the fact that publicly funded institutions are obliged to operate within the regional boundaries set down by the funding agency. This restriction is reasonable when the public purse is concerned, but less logical if the borderless world is considered. Like major countries, businesses and corporations, distance learning institutions need to consider the importance of partnerships and alliances that cross borders. Although this may seem to be a risky venture because it requires harmonization of standards, we need to trust our colleagues and even accept that the quality of their work is as good as or better than ours. Acceptance of competition as the norm, protection of turf and fragmented approaches to accountability are limiting our potential. If we are going to establish solid partnerships that will benefit the learner and the countries we live in, we have to come to the table ready to share resources, share our visions and commit to new ways of working together in a different, expanded context.

Good practice is not a universal, transferable commodity. What may work in one context may be dysfunctional in another. The context is the most important factor in determining appropriateness and effectiveness. Peter Drucker has cautioned that it is not good enough just to do things right (efficiency); we need to be sure we are doing the right things (effectiveness). One is reminded of the simple story of a young couple preparing their Christmas turkey. During the preparation, there ensues a very lengthy and heated argument about whether or not the turkey tail is to be left on before the bird is cooked or whether it is to be removed. Eventually the only way to resolve the problem was to

contact grandmother and ask why she always cut off the turkey tail. Grandmother answered simply, "I'm not sure why you would cut it off but we had to or else we couldn't get the turkey into the oven."

It is natural not to question why the turkey tail is removed before roasting when generation after generation has followed that procedure. But the turkey tail was removed because of limits set by the size of the oven. When ovens became larger there was no need to continue following past practice. When does an organization begin to question its practices or recognize that the limitations that were once there have disappeared or could be removed? With the removal of these limitations, new opportunities become possible.

THE WIRED SOCIETY: IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY

The impact of technology on society and in the way our work is conducted is another important element for consideration. For years we have discussed the use of technology in open learning. In particular, the role of telecommunications and information technologies has continued to be debated. We have argued about not allowing technology to drive our work agenda. We have argued about the robustness of the technology in helping us create interaction with students. We have agonized over which technologies will work best and which will not work well, and we have put forward recommendations on how to use technologies most effectively. We have never come to any resolution or agreement and it is doubtful that we ever will. What is becoming evident is that while we agonize over these important questions interminably, the world is passing us by. The acceptance and expanded use of technology in everyday life is rendering our protracted consideration of these issues meaningless. Individuals of all ages are involved in day-to-day activities employing a variety of technologies that are increasingly accepted as common practice. These individuals are not challenging the role of technology in their personal lives; they are using it!

Ursula Franklin defines technology as a system involving "organization procedures, symbols, new words, equations . . . and most of all a mind set." "Technology, like democracy, includes ideas and practices; it includes myths and various models of reality . . . and like democracy, technology changes the social and individual relationships between us. It has forced us to examine and redefine our notions of power and of accountability" (Franklin, 1990, p. 12).

Franklin's concerns about society's willingness to accept technology without question are based on her comparison of "growth" models and "production" models. She describes a production model as one where things are made, toward goals of total control and predictability of the process and results. Her thesis is that to date technology has been used in ways where the production model is promoted and enhanced -- a highly undesirable situation. Growth, on the other hand, can only occur with nurturing. It happens, is not made, and therefore is unpredictable. According to Franklin, schools and universities are operated under production models, where procedures and rules will deliver a predictable commodity. "If there ever was a growth process, if there ever was a holistic process, a process that cannot be divided into rigid predetermined steps, it is education" (Franklin, 1990, p. 29).

In trying to deal with the complexity of the issues of technology in distance education and open learning we have adopted production model thinking. We have packaged, or fragmented, the issues into areas such as: the learner and appropriate use of technologies; the creation of telecommunications networks; the acquisition of hardware and the development of software. This packaging has tended to result in marginalizing the role of technologies in distance education. Technologies are treated as an add-on which results

in high costs and demonstrates little evidence of payoff to the learner. A growth model would have us view distance education as an organic whole that includes technology as an integral part of the open learning system. Accepting technology as here to stay and shifting the planning and development processes to integrate technology has the potential to move distance educators closer to the real challenge -- promoting and fostering learning and the learner.

There is another reality that cannot be overlooked when the acceptance of technology is being considered, and that is the move of conventional educational institutions toward technology to extend the boundaries of the physical campus. There is a blurring of distinction between the work of distance educators and conventional educators to serve students beyond the boundaries that were originally defined in terms of campus and classroom. A recent article in *TIME* magazine described the educational institution of the future as one with no clearly defined campus, with open access to information for the learner, with a fully networked electronic learning environment and a flexible time schedule (Elson, 1992). While distance educators have reason to feel vindicated, even smug, about conventional institutions starting to realize the wisdom of our ways, we need to realize that at the same time we are in danger of being "leap-frogged", which could leave us redundant -- perhaps even extinct. In this changing world nothing is sacred, including the role of distance education and how technologies are used.

It would be ironic should distance education, a system that has always seen itself as innovative, flexible and on the cutting edge of change, be "leap-frogged" by mainstream education, a system known to be rigid, inflexible, bureaucratic and resistant to change. Is there a message here for us? Are we listening?

I am reminded of a quotation by James Burke, acclaimed author of the best-selling book and television series, *The Day the Universe Changed*, which, although verbose, makes the following strong, clear statement on the impact of technology and information: "A late-21st century complex individualistic networked informed community may look back and smile at the way that, up to the end of the 20th century, we simple hicks with our closed institutionalized inflexible traditional monolithic hierarchical slow-response bureaucratic way of doing things never seemed to know what was happening until it hit us" (cited in Business re-engineering, 1992, p. 2A).

LEARNER AS CLIENT: LEARNER AS PLANNEE

Our political leaders have been very busy trying to address the issues of economic and social change and to redress the need for education of the young, for those who are unemployed or under-employed, as well as for those who are employed but whose jobs will be changing radically.

Further, we have heard discussions of the need for organizational flexibility; the need to be responsive to learners; the need to be able to respond quickly in introducing new curriculum; and to introduce and promote the development of creative thinkers and doers. No longer is it appropriate for education to be seen as education for a job but rather as education for life. "Education must be for a lifetime of living, learning, and personal growth through discovery" (Kenney-Wallace, 1992, p. 8). Wallace argues that we need to match "access, quality, equity, and needs with institutional missions and mandates." In her presentation to the *Learning for Life* conference of the Northern American Institute, Wallace goes on to question the cartel that universities have had for over 900 years and argues that universities too often are not addressing the challenges of liberating the imagination, setting priorities and making choices, but rather are trying to deal to visible needs, not making choices and therefore not differentiating themselves from one another.

In Canada there is a growing awareness of the need for our education system to help us "learn how to learn." The focus of this need is on young preschool children and the basis of this premise is that if children learn how to learn they will continue learning throughout their lives. However, the theme "learn how to learn" is based on the assumption that these skills will be applied in a conventional classroom, where children study as a group under the direction of a professional teacher. Few are challenging the classroom assumption and even fewer are questioning that the focus is only on the young. What about the unemployed adult, the marginalized adult or the professional adult who does not know how to learn (or at least lacks the confidence to do so)? In the production or assembly line model of education, the learner is viewed as the product and is therefore adapted to fit curricular goals and outcomes. These practices remain entrenched in conventional institutions and the production model persists in our education system. Thus, we force students to fit the system rather than adapting the system to fit the learner. Interestingly, distance educators have fallen into the same trap because of their need to conform with traditional practices in order to be credible.

Opportunities to foster learning and the learner do not appear to be increasing in distance education, and we share a responsibility here, for like conventional institutions we have placed our emphasis on content and examination of content. As information grows it is impossible and foolish to believe that we can continue to identify and package the explosion of information into credit courses forever. Effective educators have to rethink the process of learning and education, to where the product of education becomes the curriculum, and curriculum is designed and modified to meet the needs of the learner. Content-based, discipline-driven approaches are being challenged at the primary and elementary school levels and should soon have an impact on the secondary and post secondary levels. Perhaps the greatest contribution of distance educators in the future will be to help individuals gain confidence in their ability to learn, to communicate measures of success and to facilitate ways in which learners can demonstrate and realize their ability to meet those measures. Distance learning should never be able to use the factory model as its excuse; as progressive educators, our agenda must be to enable the learners and learning rather than to cover content and process students.

CONCLUSION: FROGS IN HOT WATER

Distance education and open learning have always promised and delivered easier access to quality education for learners. This has been achieved through painful analysis, self criticism, and comparison to benchmarks established by conventional educational institutions. As leaders in education, in improving access to education, in identifying creative, innovative ways to empower the learner, it would be tragic to allow ourselves to be leap-frogged by the conventional systems. Clearly, we are faced with increasing challenges today and in the future.

The challenges are bound by commitments to particular methods of delivery, particular means of course production and to particular ways of providing student support services. These elements have become barriers to change. Massive investments in capital, staffing and procedures have made it difficult for us to understand, accept and adapt to changing realities and the imperative need for us to plan for and implement these changes. Conventional strategic planning models will not suffice. They need to be supplemented or replaced by nonlinear, intuitive, creative approaches that help define the visions for the future. Linear models can help with the analysis of current reality but they do not help institutions get beyond those conventional self imposed boundaries that reduce the ability of organizations to adapt. If institutions of open learning and distance education do not

create a new vision, they run the risk of being replaced by new and different institutions or by conventional institutions that have made the necessary changes.

Using the business vernacular, it is time for us to focus our energies and to identify and communicate our competitive edge in terms of levels of service, types of service, and exemplary quality of service. References in economic reports and economic reform policies continue to tie healthy, prosperous economies to a well-trained, educated and participating workforce. The potential contribution that open learning can bring to that economic agenda is massive, but technologies will need to become a naturally integrated part of our practice. The information age will empower individuals to choose their participation in a way that suits their needs and they will not wait for distance educators to continue their debate about the use of technologies in fostering the learning process. Further, we need to get our act together in providing the rationale for open learning and in providing clear input to public policy. Learners also need to be moved to the centre of the agenda, relegating content to the role of a learning tool and not an educational end in itself.

As the frogs sit comfortably in tepid water they adapt as the water temperature rises. They continue to feel comfortable until they realize too late that the temperature of the water has gradually become much too hot. If the frogs had been thrown into boiling water they would have immediately jumped out, but because the change was gradual they were blithely unaware of their danger. Open learning has always been seen as a substitute for the real thing. We have continued to convince ourselves that our role is important and I personally believe that it is critical. However, unless we begin to build partnerships and begin to share our knowledge in ways that create and confirm the contribution of open learning and move open learning to the centre of the agenda, we will perish as did the frogs when the temperature of the water became too high.

Bibliography

Bates, A. W. (1990, November). *Third generation distance education: The challenge of new technology.* Presentation to the 15th World Conference on Distance Education, Caracas, Venezuela.

Briggs, J. and F. D. Peat. (1989). *Turbulent mirror: An illustrated guide to chaos theory and the science of wholeness.* New York: Atheneum.

Brussels. Commission of the European Communities: Memorandum on Open Distance Learning in the European Community. (1991, November 12). *Final report.* 19p. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

Brussels. Commission of the European Communities: Open Distance Learning - Improving Educational Productivity. (1991, November 22). *Information memo.* 3p. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

Business re-engineering: What, why and how. (1992, June 8). *Information Week*, pp. 1A-8A.

Dunham, E. A. (1992, February). *Educational reform: The critical role of information technology.* (Occasional Paper #14). Institute for Educational Leadership.

Elson, J. (1992, April 13). Campus of the future. *TIME*, pp. 52-58.

Enchin, H. (1992, April 9). Dwindling funds force new order on universities. *The Globe and Mail*, p. C1.

Franklin, U. (1990). *The real world of technology.* CBC Massey Lectures Series. Toronto: CBC Enterprises.

Ghoshal, S. (1987). Global strategy: An organizing framework. *Strategic Management Journal*, 8, 425-440.

Keegan, D. (1988). Problems in defining the field of distance education. *The American Journal of Distance Education*, 2.2, 4-11.

Kenney-Wallace, G. (1992, May 22-24). Plato, cartels, and competitiveness policy: How to shape a new educational paradigm. In Rod Dobell and Michael Neufeld (Eds.), *Proceedings of the North American Institute Conference Live and Learn, Learn and Live.* (pp. 8-13). Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Oolichan Books.

Marien, M. (1970, December). The basic, long-term multifold trend in education. *The Futurist*, 4.5, 220-223.

Moore, M. G. (Ed.). (1990). *Contemporary issues in American distance education.* Toronto: Pergamon.

Moore, M. G, M. M. Thompson, B. A. Quigley, G. C. Clark and G. G. Goff. (1990). *The effects of distance learning: A summary of literature.* Number 2 in the Research Monograph series. Toronto: Pergamon.

Paine, N. (Ed). (1988). *Open learning in transition: An agenda for action.* Cambridge: National Extension College.

Paul, R. H. (1990). Open learning and open management: Leadership and integrity in distance education. New York: Nichols Publishing.

Pfeiffer, J. W., L. D. Goodstein and T. M. Nolan. (1989). *Shaping strategic planning frogs, dragons, bees and turkey tails*. London: Scott, Foresman and Company.

Priorities for new training and learning technology in the 1990's -- A strategic review of flexible learning technology. (1990). Delta (Development of European Learning Through Technology Advance) project.

Ramanujam, V., and N. Venkatraman. (1987). Planning system characteristics and planning effectiveness. *Strategic Management Journal*, 8, 453-468.

Rumble, G. (1986). The planning and management of distance education. New York: St. Martin's.

Senge, P. M. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization.* New York: Doubleday.

U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment. (1989). *Linking for learning: A new course for education.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.